



Bepton, Chilgrove and the South Downs

Distance: 16½ km=10 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: West Sussex

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Refreshments: Chilgrove, Hooksway

Map: Explorer 120 (Chichester) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Church, orchids, hills, views, woodland, burial site, country inns

In Brief

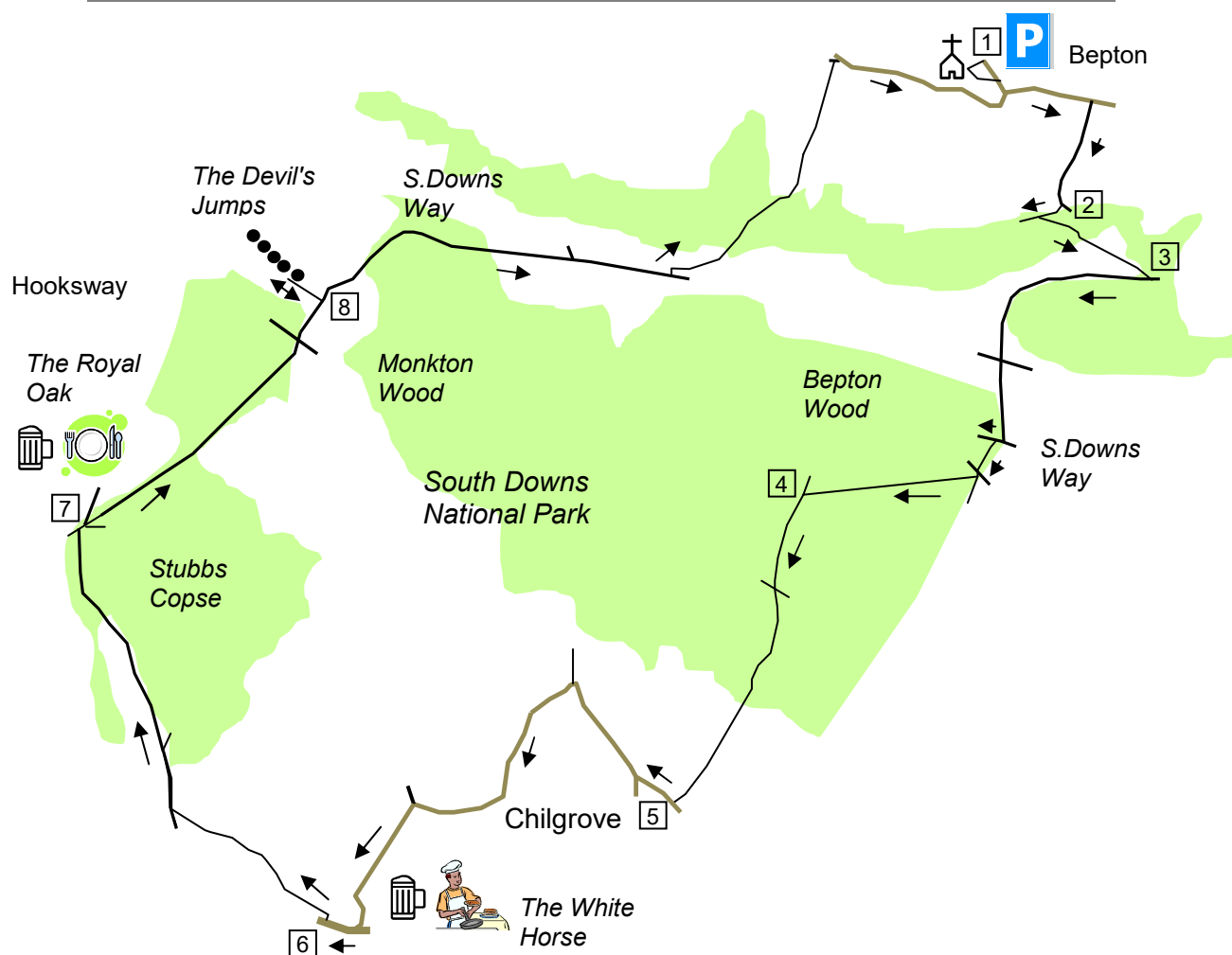
Here is another Downland walk that you will remember long after for its beauty and originality. A Norman church, a secret orchid hillside and a Bronze-Age burial site are among the surprises, along with two excellent country pubs. (To book at the *White Horse*, ring 01243-519-444.)



There are just a few nettles on the approach to the orchid hillside. Although this walk can be done with good walking shoes in the drier months, you will be glad to be wearing boots on two or three of the tracks. Since the few stiles on this route have left a gap, your dog can come too and can run free for much of the way.

The walk begins at **Church Farm, Bepton**, West Sussex, **postcode GU29 0HX**, grid reference **SU 855 183**. This is approached from the village of Cocking just south of Midhurst and the day's adventure really begins here as you follow a narrow country lane under an old railway bridge and through the best Sussex farm land to an ancient village hidden beneath the South Downs. Bepton's 12th-century church is at the end of a short branch lane. There is a large space provided by the farm for visitors to the church and they welcome walkers. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

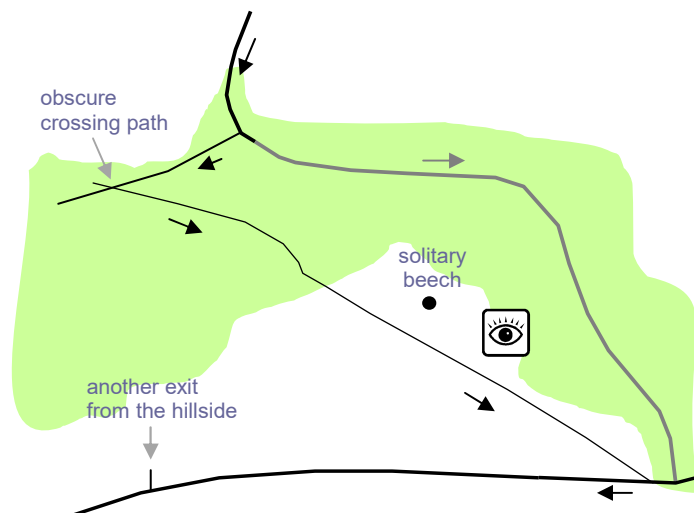


- 1 From the side of the car park, follow a wooden rail and a little tarmac path to go through a wooden swing-gate past a bench with views, reaching the side entrance to the church. This little church is usually open and is definitely worth visiting.

Bepton is named after Babo, a Saxon chieftain who arrived in the year 480, hence 'Babintone', the settlement of Babo's people. A wooden church stood on this site for 500 years from the time of St Wilfrid of Selsea. Its stone font is all that remains. The new church was built by the Normans in 1185 with walls from local flint and chalk, 3½ feet thick. It was left almost unchanged till Victorian times. Near the side entrance is a mass grave of victims of the Black Death of 1340.

Continue down a path from the side entrance to exit through a wooden swing-gate onto the approach lane. Turn **right**, going past a small pond, and turn **left** at a T-junction onto Bugshill Lane. You pass the *Old Rectory* and a farm and reach a junction in 400m with Bepton village on your left. Instead turn **right** on a signed byway. Follow this stone-lined path for 500m. *If you encounter some mud here it should soon be gone and should not return until just before the end.* As the path curves left into trees you come to a marker post on your left.

2 What follows here is a remarkable route to the orchid hillside and you will need to concentrate. See adjoining mini-map. If you do not wish to visit Bepton Down, simply keep straight on for another ½ km and turn **right** at a T-junction, skipping the rest of this section. Turn **right** at the marker post, as indicated by the blue arrow, steeply uphill, in 30m going under a tall beech and a yew tree. After the yew tree you need to



measure exactly 100m (150 paces). The path rises for 60m, then flattens out under ash trees. After 25m, it rises a little, zigzagging slightly left-right over roots. Immediately look for a faint path **very sharp left**. (In fact it is a crossing path.) The path runs straight up a long gently rising contour. Take this path, almost reversing your direction. The path becomes clearer as you proceed, although you will need to step over the debris of small fallen branches. After 170m, your path comes into a lighter area of shrubs and curves right up to a small metal gate. Go through the gate onto Bepton Down.



Bepton Down is a place that walkers usually pass unnoticed, known only to a few local people. The meadow is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) because of its rich content of wild flowers, especially several varieties of orchid. Hundreds of pyramid orchid are on display, ranging in colour from pink to magenta, also common spotted and early purple orchids.

Keep ahead up the sloping meadow on a faint path, but keeping just to the left of the brow of the hill so that you get the best advantage of the fine views to your left. You pass a solitary round beech about 30m on your left.



The views are of Black Down and Bexleyhill. Keep following the path into the far corner where there is a large metal gate. Go through a wooden swing-gate beside it and turn very sharp **right** on a broad track.

3

The grassy slope of Bepton Down, with fine views beyond, is now on your right, with steep woods on your left. Stay on this chalky path, soon avoiding an unmarked path on your left. The path curves left, flattens out and runs between fields, leading to a 4-way fingerpost. The crossing track here is the South Downs Way. Cross straight over on a grassy bridleway and, in 350m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **right**. In 25m, turn **left** on a horse track slightly downhill. *Muntjac deer roam these woods and you may be lucky enough to see them.* In 150m, go straight over a wide forestry track on what may be a rather muddy patch. In just 20m, leave your straight downward path by forking **right** on another wide forestry track through Bepton Wood. You shortly pass a 2-way fingerpost, confirming that this is an official bridleway. Your path descends gently, then more steeply and afterwards suddenly up again between plantations. You reach a junction of several paths by a 3-way fingerpost.

- 4 There are two possible routes through the forest to Chilgrove: the one chosen here takes you through West Dean Woods nature reserve and is especially attractive, although there is slightly more quiet lane walking afterwards. Turn **left** on a signed bridleway and follow this stony path for 450m where the bridleway goes over a crossing path near a wooden gate on your left. *Note the grassy fringe on your left is another haven for orchids.* You shortly pass notices for Sussex Wildlife Trust's West Dean Woods and a rather worn picnic corner. On your left is a long wattle fence. After an inspirational walk, you emerge by open fields with views ahead. Tall oaks and ash trees are your escort along narrower grassy path. Finally our path ends at a wooden gate beside a large metal gate. Turn **right** here on a tarmac lane.
- 5 At a road junction, veer **right**, signposted *Chilgrove*, passing Staple Ash Farm and its thatched farm house. At a sharp left bend by a drive and wooden gate, keep **left**, staying on the lane. Just before *Yew Tree Cottage*, ignore a footpath on your right. Your undulating lane goes under grid lines and curves right: avoid a footpath on the left here. At a 3-way fingerposted junction ignore a drive on the right for Brooks Farm and keep left passing several picturesque houses and cottages with their gardens. *Note that the trophy fingerpost in the garden of no. 11 is for ornamentation only and does not indicate a right-of-way!* Soon the lane zigzags left-right and reaches the *White Horse* in Chilgrove.



The White Horse is not really a rambler's inn as most of its clientele are the Chichester and Goodwood set (it even has a helipad), but it proclaims itself a "community pub", if this scattered village of studs and country seats can be called a "community". The patio and the small garden are a delight and the garden-level wide-bedded rooms named after game birds are superb. Food is comforting rather than adventurous and the prices just a little above average. Worth considering, in tune with the rustic setting, is the "grazing" menu, rather like English tapas.

- 6 After a refreshment break, continue to the main road and turn **right**, using the grass verge where possible. In a short distance, go through a modern kissing-gate on your **right** and turn immediately **left** on the grass parallel to the road. As the meadow opens out, veer slightly right to go through another kissing-gate and straight across a crop field. A kissing-gate, a drive and another kissing-gate lead you along the right-hand side of a pasture. After a line of trees, you are walking beside another pasture similarly. At the other side, go over a stile by a fingerpost and veer **right** onto a bridleway. At a fork with two large wooden gates, take the **left** fork as indicated. After a pleasant 500m, keep ahead at a diagonal crossing path by a 4-way fingerpost. Eventually, 1 km after the fork, you reach the hamlet of Hooksway opposite the *Royal Oak*.



The Royal Oak is one of the celebrated pubs of the area. As well as food and drink, it has quite a history. For details see the pub walk in the series "the Royal Oak at Hooksway". Another walk in this series "Harting Down" also calls at Hooksway.

- 7 After your break, facing the pub, turn **right** and keep straight on avoiding a bridleway through the car park on your left. There are now three possible routes ahead. Avoid the footpath by the wooden gate on your right and the track curving off to the left and take the **middle** option, passing a sign for a *restricted byway* uphill. Your path continues on a straight course, gradually uphill. After more than 1 km, you reach a 4-way fingerpost: keep straight ahead, thus joining the South Downs Way (SDW). You will be following the

SDW for most of the rest of the way. Soon there are meadows visible on either side as you go under large beeches. Soon, on your left is a sign for the *Devil's Jumps*, a Bronze Age monument and a short diversion not to be missed.



The Devil's Jumps tumuli rise like five small islands in the surrounding country, the largest linear barrow formation in West Sussex. This Bronze Age cemetery consists of five large bell barrows running south-east to north-west, apparently oriented to the setting sun on Midsummer Day. There are two smaller outlying barrows. Their construction is dated at roughly 3,500 years ago.

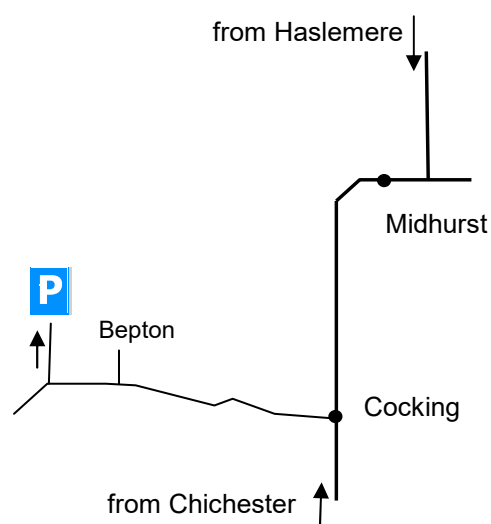
- 8 Continue along the SDW and shortly ignore a stile and footpath on your left. You are now on a beautiful wide path through a luxurious woodland of tall ash trees. The path curves right imperceptibly. Suddenly you are out of the woods with terrific views on both sides. At the end of the long meadow on your left, ignore a bridleway sharp left. The path rises with a view of Linch Down ahead. At the end of a fence, just after a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** on a byway that curves **right** down into trees (*don't miss this turn!*). The path makes a shallow descent down the side of the hill with Didling Hanger on your left. The path becomes sunken under beeches and ash. At a junction of paths near a meadow on your left, keep straight on downhill. The path continues between banks and you finally arrive at a drive in front of Linch Farm, through a large metal gate. Turn **right** and veer right on a tarmac lane, Bugshill Lane again. After some houses, the church comes into view on your left. The lane bends left under maple and beech. Turn **left** on a cul-de-sac lane leading back to Church Farm where the walk began.



For final refreshments after the walk, the "Bluebell Inn" in Cocking and the "Greyhound" just south of Midhurst serve good food.

Getting there

By car: If coming from the north, take the A286 through Haslemere and Midhurst, following signs for *Chichester*. Bepton is signed west from the A286 Midhurst-Chichester road in the centre of Cocking, just before the *Bluebell Inn*. Follow the narrow winding lane for 1¼ miles, keep straight on at a 3-way junction (signposted *Didling, Harting*) and continue another ¼ mile where you will see a right turn for Bepton Church. Go to the end and park thoughtfully in the generous space provided by Church Farm.



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